

Dear Friends,

As we end the week marking the celebration of the life of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, there are some things that we must commit to do to keep Dr. King's dream alive.

We have come a long way since Rosa Parks sat down and stood up for all of us. We have come a long way since President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. And we have come a long way since Dr. King outlined his dream. But the dream is not complete.

The dream is not complete when more than half our schools have at least 70 percent of their students living in poverty; when one in every five schools has an enrollment with more than 90 percent of the students in poverty; when half of our high school students don't graduate in four years; when a third don't graduate at all; and when we send our children to schools along the **Corridor of Shame** with holes in the walls, leaking roofs, broken toilets, and other Third-World-like conditions.

The dream is not complete when we as a state do not guarantee equitable and adequate funding for all of our students, whether they're urban or rural, rich or poor, black or white.

When I ran for State Superintendent of Education in 2006, a lot of people thought that I couldn't get elected. We proved all the doubters wrong, and we did what many thought couldn't be done.

As a matter of fact, we're still doing what they say can't be done. We are focusing on a **five-point plan** for South Carolina's schools that includes accelerating innovation, increasing public school choice, refining accountability for maximum results with minimum testing, elevating and reinvigorating our teaching profession, and providing fair and more equitable funding for schools.

A year to the day before his life was taken in Memphis, Dr. King spoke from the pulpit of the Riverside Church in New York City. That day he said something that has stuck with me.

He said, "Silence is betrayal."

It's not enough to feel empathy for the children of this state living in poverty, going to underfunded, outdated, and ineffective schools. It's not acceptable to go about our daily lives knowing about these conditions and doing nothing about it.

Dr. King said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

If you're not standing on the mountain top, yelling at the top of your voice to correct these injustices, it's the same as supporting them.

Being silent betrays tens of thousands of children, their families, their communities, and the future of our state.

The time is now to stand up, speak out, and be counted. We have waited in the wings for too long for someone else to fix this problem. This isn't someone else's problem. It's our problem. And we must fix it.

I believe that we have the potential to change course and make South Carolina the envy of the nation when it comes to our public schools. And I think we have the potential to turn around the generations of apathy and neglect that have left so many of our students, schools, and communities behind.

No one person can meet this challenge. We must do this together – if the dream is to be complete.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education